A STUDY OF SOME PROPOSED PROCEDURES FOR DETERMINING THE AIMS OF EDUCATION

BY

FRED CARLISLE HOOD

A.B., Southern Illinois State Normal University, 1918

A.M., University of Illinois, 1926

AN ABSTRACT OF A THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN EDUCATION IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS, 1940

URBANA, ILLINOIS

1940

A STUDY OF SOME PROPOSED PROCEDURES FOR DETERMINING THE AIMS OF EDUCATION

BY

FRED CARLISLE HOOD

A.B., Southern Illinois State Normal University, 1918

A.M., University of Illinois, 1926

AN ABSTRACT OF A THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN EDUCATION IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS, 1940

URBANA, ILLINOIS

1940

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

For his interest in this type of study, the writer is deeply indebted to the late Professor Cameron and Dean M. T. McClure. He is under obligation also to Professor Cameron for encouragement and direction during the time of making the study. He wishes to express appreciation for the many helpful suggestions received from Professor W. S. Monroe and Professor J. A. Clement. He also owes a debt of gratitude to Professor B. O. Smith for the time and assistance which he gave so unsparingly while the writing was undergoing final revision.

A STUDY OF SOME PROPOSED PROCEDURES FOR DETERMINING THE AIMS OF EDUCATION

There is a widespread conviction that we are confronted with a serious need for curriculum reconstruction. This conviction appears to be accompanied by uncertainty as to what fundamental purposes reconstruction should serve. In much of the literature which is intended to deal explicitly with this question we find proposed purposes stated with such lack of definiteness that readers may be left bewildered. The challenge has been raised as to whether educators have any clear idea of what it is they are trying to do. As one writer states, "They undertake to provide a 'good' education without any clear notion of what such an ducation would be like if it could be had."[1] Another writer has viewed the present situation with respect to educational aims as one which presents a confusion "probably unparalleled in past time."[2] Then this writer goes on to say that "There is nothing accepted as axiomatic, nothing beyond the possibility of questioning, and few things that are not actually attacked. . . It is not merely this or that method for securing educational results but ideals and aims are under fire."[2]

Perhaps the last quotation should be regarded as an extreme statement of the author's view. At least in another connection he states that "number, linguistic forms, words, history, etc. are social tools, such important social instrumentalities that social life could not be carried on without them . . . society would relapse into barbarism without the transmission of the arts, skills and understandings which make up the traditional curriculum."[3] The mastering of these "important social instrumentalities" is an aim of education which few persons, if any, would care to question. Evidently the vagueness or confusion with respect to aims of education does not extend to aims of this sort. The confusion, it appears, is conceived to arise when an attempt is made to settle the question of the *nature of the uses* to which these instrumentalities should be put. Such answers to the question as are to be found in much educational literature are often so vague that it is difficult to reduce them to definite propositions. And the reader may be left in grave doubt as to whether

such propositions as he is able to extract would be accepted by the authors as a fair statement of their intended meanings.

I. Purpose and Procedure

The study was made for the purpose of a) locating sources of confusion in controversies over the question of determining the aims of education, b) more definitely defining the issues involved, and c) indicating, when possible, how agreement might be reached or how further inquiry might be made more fruitful.

In the attempt to attain this purpose, writings bearing upon the question of determining the aims of education were examined in order to obtain statements of the issues involved. In this examination it appeared that controversies arise over four proposed ways of approaching the task of determining the purposes, aims, or objectives of education. These proposed approaches may be stated as follows: a) Analyze a field of activities for the purpose of determining the particular activities which belong to the highest type, and then take, as the basic aim of education, the development of the dispositions and abilities to perform such activities. b) Ascertain the needs of the individual and take the satisfaction of these needs as the fundamental purpose of education. c) Determine the existing, or predicted, needs of society and make the function of education that of preparing the individual to meet these needs. d) Decide upon the type of social order that we want and make the function of education that of serving as an instrumentality in effecting such a reconstruction of present affairs as will conform to the conception of what is socially desirable.

When these approaches are challenged, certain issues arise. They may be stated as follows: a) Are the facts obtained by analysis, or a program of basic social purposes, to be taken as the determining factor in making a choice of educational aims? b) Does educating to meet social needs preclude the development of individuality, or does it offer opportunity for such development? c) Is the conception of individuality as predetermined by original nature, or the conception that it is shaped by the nature of experiences, to be taken as the basis of educational aims? d) Should some basic attitudes and beliefs with respect

to the nature of desirable social patterns be set up for the child to accept or should the child be left free from the influence of the teacher to form its own attitudes and beliefs? In this study, these are the issues about which the discussion centers.

In the attempt to locate sources of confusion with respect to these issues, quotations which appeared most clearly to express each issue were selected. A major consideration in making the selections was the extent of attention that the writings in which the quotations are found had received from those interested in the controversies. Some quotations, however, were selected chiefly because they seemed to offer the most definite expression to be found of the issue being considered. Also the writer's own judgment of the worth of a writing was used as a basis for selection.

The language of the selected quotations was examined to ascertain whether ambiguities might have obscured the writer's intended meaning. An attempt was made to derive the intended sense of ambiguous terms from the assumptions that appeared to control the writer's thinking. These assumptions were questioned with respect to their acceptability and the reasoning based upon them was examined for logical validity. In the light of the results, statements of position were reconsidered with the view to revealing either unrecognized agreements or irreconcilable differences with respect to basic beliefs.

II. Results

In the consideration of controversies over the question of determining the aims of education, it appeared that there is a greater amount of agreement than the language in which positions are stated would at first seem to indicate. Agreement with respect to basic views may be obscured both by language difficulties and by failure to keep reasoning free from fallacies. Only a few ways in which language difficulties arise and unwarranted judgments are formed need to be recognized in order to avoid much of the confusion over the question of determining the aims of education.

Confusion has arisen from the fact that the same word, or words, are used to express different ideas. Misinterpretations

could have been avoided if writers had made clear the precise sense in which they intended to use ambiguous terms. The clarification of the meanings of ambiguous terms, by bringing to light the concealed assumption from which they derive their precise senses, will reveal either disguised agreements or the fact that the sources of significant disagreements arise from the assumptions themselves. A writer may unconsciously permit presuppositions to control his thinking which he, himself, would reject, or wish to modify, if he were forced to acknowledge them as the beliefs upon which his reasoning rests. Much confusion might be eliminated by recognizing and formulating concealed assumptions that operate as major premises.

A few fallacies were found to cause a considerable amount of confusion in dealing with the question of determining aims for education. They need only to be pointed out to be recognized. The following are the ones which were found to be the cause of the major difficulties:

a) The assumption that activities placed in a certain grouping on the basis of some common quality, trait, or function do not possess other features that would serve as a basis for other groupings.

b) Taking one criterion of an aim as a sufficient test of its acceptability when additional criteria are needed, or, stated in other terms, mistaking a necessary for a sufficient condition.

c) The substitution of all or none for some.

d) The assumption that a choice must be made between two alternatives when more than two are possible.

e) The assumption that questions of comparative value can be settled apart from considerations of facts.

No claim is made that the foregoing causes of confusion constitute a comprehensive list. They are the major ones that were found. If there are others, they should be identified and avoided by both writers and critics. To the extent that thinking and criticism become a cooperative enterprise, basic agreements will be brought to light and needless controversies eliminated. The removal of language difficulties and the avoidance of fallacies will not, however, eliminate all significant disagreements. While unanimity of opinion is not necessarily desirable, it is desirable

that agreements, where they exist, be recognized and that confusion, due to obscurity, be converted into clearly defined issues. This study represents an attempt to make some contribution to the achievement of this goal.

---

[1] Bode, Boyd H. "The Confusion in Present Day Education" in *The Educational Frontier*, National Society of College Teachers of Education Yearbook XXI. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1933, p. 10-11.

[2] Dewey, John. *The Way Out of Educational Confusion.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1929, p. 1.

[3] Dewey, John. "The Social-Economic Situation and Education" in *The Educational Frontier*, National Society of College Teachers of Education Yearbook XXI. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1933, p. 51.

VITA

Fred Carlisle Hood was born on November 4, 1889, near McLeansboro, Illinois. He attended the public schools in Hamilton County, Illinois. In 1909, he entered the Southern Illinois State Normal University where he was graduated with the degree of Bachlor of Arts in 1918. In the summer of 1923, he entered the University of Illinois, from which institution he received the degree of Master of Arts in 1926. Since 1926, he has done additional graduate work at the University of Illinois.

During the school years 1908-09 and 1911-12, he taught in the rural schools of Hamilton County, Illinois. He was principal of school at Noble, Illinois during the school years of 1915-16 and 1916-17 and at Galatia, Illinois during the school years of 1918-19 and 1919-20. In 1920, he went to Vandalia, Illinois as teacher of English in the Vandalia High School. In 1921, he became principal of the Vandalia High School, which position he held until 1925 when he went to the University of Illinois. During the school years of 1925-26 and 1926-27, he was part-time assistant in the Department of Philosophy in the University of Illinois. In 1927, he became Assistant High School Visitor for the University of Illinois, which position he now holds.